

Seasons Change by Luddleston

Series: [Gravity](#)[4]

Category: Dragon Age (Video Games), Dragon Age - All Media Types, Dragon Age: Origins

Genre: Anal Fingering, Canon Compliant, Canon-Typical Violence, Canonical Character Death, Established Relationship, F/M, Missing Scene, Snowed In, alistair is on the road to getting pegged and he's enjoying the journey

Language: English

Characters: Alistair (Dragon Age), Female Amell (Dragon Age), Leliana (Dragon Age), Morrigan (Dragon Age), Oghren (Dragon Age), Shale (Dragon Age), Sten (Dragon Age), Wynne (Dragon Age), Zevran Arainai

Relationships: Alistair/Amell (Dragon Age), Alistair/Female Warden (Dragon Age)

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Summary:

Alistair has been snowed in somewhere in the Frostbacks, attacked by too many tentacles in the Deep Roads, pulled back through some of his worst childhood memories, and locked up (mostly) naked in Fort Drakon, but that's what it takes to stop the Blight, apparently.

They have some fun along the way, at least.

Seasons Change

Author's Note:

I've finished playing the game which means I can finish this series! It's going in two parts, however, because I got carried away with them getting snowed in and then it got very long, so next up is the Landsmeet and the endgame.

.....there are some bits i'm not looking forward to in the next installment, i will admit.

The road between Ostagar and Orzammar is a long one, and the weather is turning foul.

Alistair is used to Ferelden winters, but it's clear there are members of their crew who aren't. Zevran gripes about being forced into winter gear that actually involves *sleeves* and *trousers*, Sten doesn't complain, but he's gritting his teeth to keep them from chattering, and Wynne is moving slower with the cold pressing on her joints. There's an unspoken urgency to keep an eye on Wynne in particular, especially after she collapsed during a routine scuffle with some darkspawn a few days back. George talked with her afterward at camp, and says she's alright, but Alistair worries. It's just how he is.

Bundled up as they can be, it's still slow going. They have to plan their routes carefully to ensure they'll have shelter enough for the nights, because tents won't be sufficient. Caves and valleys help, but inns and villages are better. Half their traveling party, including Bodhan, Sandal, and the emissaries are back at a village near Haven, waiting out the worst of the storms before they follow. Alistair's glad for that, there's no way the wagons would make it through all this.

When the storm *really* hits, things get bad. It's a total white-out. Morrigan can't pull her usual tactic of shifting into a raven and scouting the next safe spot for the night, because she'd get swept away by the wind, and she wouldn't be able to see through the flurries anyhow. George says that maybe

she and Morrigan can just turn into bears and keep everyone warm, but it's a joke of a suggestion, because that sort of shape requires more energy than they have the supplies to upkeep.

He thinks he can hear Leliana praying. He can't help but feel that it's useless, and he also can't help but wish he had enough faith to feel otherwise.

They're all behind Shale like ducklings in a row following their mother, using her bulk to keep the wind from whipping through them and stepping in the tracks she leaves in the snowfall. Alistair hangs toward the back with Sten, so the buffer from the wind is mostly lost on him, but it's more important for the others to have protection from the gales. There's a system in place—they're all in a line, each holding onto one part of the person in front of them. Alistair, taking up the rear, has a strap of Sten's armor in his hand, his fingers freezing despite his gloves. The warmth balm he applied earlier that day wore off hours ago, though if anybody asks, it's still working.

The sun is starting to go down. He wasn't able to see the sun in the first place, but everything is getting dark and they haven't reached shelter yet. He's lived through enough snowstorms to know this is *bad*.

And then something lights up the gloom.

It's a bright flare, and for a moment, Alistair thinks they're under attack, but he realizes, as fat snowflakes reflect that warm orange light and sparkle like tinsel hung over a fireplace, that it's George. And she's illuminating the dark, boxy shape of a farmhouse.

Maybe Leliana's prayers *were* answered.

It's empty and it's locked. The inhabitants probably fled the Blight. But it's *sturdy*, thick wood and brick, and it's safer than anywhere they've stayed in days. Leliana lets George warm her hands for her with another flash of bright magic so they're steady enough that she can pick the lock.

Even just the lack of wind makes Alistair feel warmer once they've all been herded inside. He rubs his ears 'till they stop smarting from the cold, sneezing in the musty air. In another stroke of luck, they find that the cabin is fully stocked. It's a bit crowded for seven people, a mabari, and a golem (especially the golem), but there's a pantry with a good quantity of salted, dried meat, some root vegetables that are still in good condition, and a lot of bread that is very much indistinguishable from rocks.

Can't have everything, he supposes.

George piles some of the stacked-up firewood into the grate and lights the fire with an easy burst of magic. Morrigan, Leliana and Zevran work on scraping together something to eat, because they don't trust Alistair and George when their supplies are so limited.

George checks Pudding's paws, and finds that putting the warmth balm on them has successfully kept him as safe as the rest of them, while Sten helps the mabari out of the little dog-jacket-thing they found for him to keep him warm even though his fur's a bit short for the weather. Alistair goes into the back bedroom to find as many blankets as he can to bring them close to the fire so Wynne has someplace warm to rest, walking through the cloud of steam that's coming up from Shale, who's wearing fire crystals to keep the ice from forming cracks in her stone.

Alistair's just gotten Wynne settled in an armchair and reminded Sten to remove his outer layer and let it dry, when Zevran pops out of the pantry with a triumphant yell of something in Antivan, a bottle held above his head.

"Is that for the food?" George asks him, currently undoing her braid and shaking fat droplets of melted ice onto the floor.

"No, my dearest friend, it is *liquor*."

Just that is enough to have Alistair concerned, but thankfully Wynne speaks up before they can do something too stupid. "*After* you eat, or you'll make yourself sick."

"You are a wise woman," Zevran tells her, giving her a kiss on the cheek as he passes and handing the bottle to her. "For safekeeping."

George is a lightweight. Alistair had a glass of wine with her at the inn in Lothering, and she was tipsy halfway through.

They were interrupted by a group of men trying to kill them for the crime of being Grey Wardens, and then interrupted again by Leliana deciding to join up with their group, but Alistair still has half an idea what it takes to get George drunk.

Dinner is incredible, warm and filling and doesn't at all taste like it's been sitting in a storeroom ever since the owners of this place fled the darkspawn. Alistair's shirt, trousers, and socks are finally dry, and he's flat on his back in front of the fire, using Pudding as a pillow, cozy as could be and ready to fall asleep, when something taps against his chest.

He opens his eyes to find it's the bottom end of a bottle, and George is holding the neck of it.

It's a bottle that was a lot more full when last he saw it. "How much of this did you drink?"

"Not *all* of that, Alistair. Just like—this much." She holds her fingers apart from one another to indicate the level on the bottle she was responsible for consuming. "Since when are you so concerned about that?"

He does take the bottle, sitting up so he can drink, propping a cushion against the couch and leaning back against it because he's still feeling a bit lazy. It's *vile* stuff, so strong it's sharp in his nose, and he coughs, takes another drink to soothe his throat, and swallows more cleanly that time.

Actually, on the second drink, it's not so bad.

It turns out there's another bottle. Before they can open that one, Wynne retreats to the back room to go to bed, saying they don't want an old lady spoiling their fun. Alistair thinks that's absolutely not true and Zevran says as much, but she truly does seem exhausted. Shale goes to the back room

with her, so her crystals will keep it plenty warm while Wynne sleeps, and George trots after them to make sure there's enough blankets.

When George comes back from seeing to Wynne, she finds that Zevran has stolen her seat.

That is to say, Zevran is in Alistair's lap.

Ordinarily, this might make Alistair blush and stammer, but he's in a comfortable heap with his back up against somebody else's enormous embroidered cushion and his front facing the fireplace, and he's warm down his toes thanks to unidentifiable booze and flickering flames and Zevran's body heat. Leliana is curled up on the couch behind them, with Morrigan sitting on the back of it like a heathen who never learnt to use furniture properly, and Sten has fallen asleep flat on his back on the floor beside Pudding. It's like they're some sort of very odd, very muddled-up family. He's all fuzzy about it.

"Get out of my spot," George says to Zevran, wrapping her arms around his torso and yanking with what is nowhere near her full strength. It's quite ineffectual, and Alistair laughs, assuming she's failing so magnificently as a joke. He's seen her toss Zevran around to great effect.

Apparently she is not joking. She whines and flops onto the couch, laying her head in Leliana's lap. Morrigan sinks down to sit on top of George's legs, and reaches over so Zevran can pass her the bottle.

"This *stuff*," George says. "This stuff has *sapped me* of my powers."

"Your power to what? Wrestle me? You are welcome to try," Zevran says.

"You want me to, I bet," George says.

"There is nothing like being pinned beneath a very lovely woman. Especially if I am still on top of Alistair, that would be ideal."

Alistair swats him in the arm.

"Wait. Zev. Are you talking about like... are you *talking* about a sex thing, or is it just your voice?" George asks. "Because sometimes, there's that thing your voice does—"

Zevran trills demonstratively. He sounds like a cat purring. It's the same thing he does whenever he puts emphasis on words with the letter *R* in them.

"—that, yes, and it makes everything seem sexy."

"It is always safe to assume that *anything* I am saying could be an innuendo," Zevran says. He leans his head back against Alistair's chest, and Alistair feels one of his pointy little ears flicking. "I am rarely *un* interested in such a thing."

Alistair tries to catch Zev's ear between his fingers, but he flicks it again, like an annoyed cat.

"Teach me how to do that," George says.

"What, how to be interested in sex? I would *hope* Alistair has that covered."

Morrigan laughs and Alistair loses his attempt to grab Zevran's ear to smack her foot instead.

"Not *that*. He does. I meant this—" she tries to do the same little trill/purr thing. She sounds as if she's managed to trip over her own tongue while nearly swallowing it.

"I have never been able to do that, myself," Leliana says. "It is not something that happens in an Orlesian accent."

"Nor a Ferelden one," Zevran notes. "But everybody in Antiva speaks this way. And since I was raised there, I was raised speaking with this particular accent, and I shall continue. But I've no idea how to teach somebody else. Terribly sorry, dear lady."

While George is saying, "*how dare you, I am a gentleman*," Alistair tries the thing with his tongue. He must succeed, because she stops, puts her face over his shoulder and very nearly cracks her chin into Zevran's head, and says, "You! How did you do that!? Let me see your tongue."

"Disgusting!" Morrigan announces, like it's a toast, hoisting the bottle and taking another drink.

Alistair thinks it would be cheeky to just lick George's face, but he does *not* succeed. He *does* successfully get Zevran's ear at last. Just not with his fingertips.

"Oh, do *not* start something we both know you will not finish, Alistair," Zevran says, in that low, *dangerous* rumble of his, the voice that makes George think he sounds like he's talking about sex all the time. He sort of does sound like he's talking about sex all the time. Especially when he says Alistair's name like that.

"I was trying to get *George*, not you."

"Come here, then," George says, and when he turns his head, she kisses him full on the mouth.

She's never kissed in front of other people before. Certainly she hasn't kissed him while she's laying *on top of other people*. But she's not stopping and he's not either, and the home-brewed whiskey or moonshine or whatever it was makes his stomach swoop to even more intense depths than it usually does when they kiss.

He can feel Zevran shifting around on his lap. George has her tongue in his mouth. Morrigan is probably going to kick him in the head as soon as she can maneuver herself in that direction. He thinks George is petting his hair, too, but both her hands are on his shoulders, so it must be Leliana.

There's so much going on around him, his mind struggles to catch up. If George keeps kissing him, he's gonna get hard with Zevran on his lap, so he *has* to pull back.

She follows him, though. And he's a weak man, he can't help but kiss her back again. And again.

Zevran shifts around a bit, laying his head on Alistair's chest. Alistair thinks Zevran's watching them, but he can't focus on that. It's almost too much. Nobody's ever seen him like this but George, and now he has three people close enough to touch him while she takes him for everything he's worth. Leliana's fingertips run down the base of his neck and he shivers, squeezing down on Zevran's thigh, which got under his hand at some point. Alistair feels warm and soft and dreamy and he *swears* he's making noises, but none of them seem to care.

George bites his lower lip and then kisses him again, getting sloppier the longer they go, like they're about to do a lot more than kiss. Leliana's hand leaves his head, but he can still hear fingertips running through hair, so she must be petting Zevran. Morrigan probably has turned into a bird and flown to the rafters to get away. George slips him her tongue again and one of her hands skirts down to squeeze his chest and he *definitely* moans.

Just when he's starting to think he's going to have to seriously consider how far he's about to let her go, she pulls back, gives him a considering look, and says, "I think I'm going to sleep now."

She drops her head onto Leliana's lap and passes out right there.

Alistair clears his throat just to have something to do with his mouth. "Sorry."

"Do *not* be," Zevran says.

"The two of you are very sweet." Leliana ruffles his hair again, and he's still so tipsy he can't help but smile.

He turns his head and is surprised to see the Morrigan has *not* vanished to the rafters. He raises an eyebrow at her. She raises one back. That's probably all he can expect from her on the matter.

"Get some rest," Leliana says, which is an instruction he'll gladly follow.

When he wakes the next morning, he's not the first one up. There's already so much commotion in the little house that he doesn't know how he's slept through it. Wynne comes to his side and gives him a cup of tea, which he appreciates, and he surveys the long dining table of the house, which has been laid out with all the contents of the pantry.

"It appears we are still snowed in," Wynne tells him. "We have been busy taking an inventory, to ensure we'll be all right for a few days if need be. I believe Georgiana woke at dawn."

Alistair doesn't bother hiding his yawn. "She's a morning person. Even after a night of drinking, it seems."

"*And* still young enough that she does not wake hung over." Wynne sounds wryly jealous.

Alistair isn't hungover, either, he's just tired. He never really gets hangovers, but he's always assumed this is because he's a rather large man, and he soaks up all the alcohol. Then again, perhaps George has the same benefit. The only person broader than Alistair for their height among the group is Sten, and George is right behind him (Shale doesn't count).

"What needs doing?" he asks, stretching until his back pops.

"Nothing, at present," Wynne says, folding her hands in her lap. Alistair sits on the couch beside her instead of on the floor, figuring it's more polite to be up here. "Breakfast is almost ready."

"Is *that* what smells completely divine?" he asks.

George must have heard, because she buzzes past them saying, "Leliana knows how to *bake*. She made bread, and there are about four types of jam, and—oh, and also, good morning."

George always seems busy, but it's a bit out of place in the middle of a house instead of in camp, where her ranging around doesn't seem quite so

manic. He can't imagine what she'd been like at the Circle, where all this energy would have gone.

"Morning," he says. "Are you going to lose your mind being cooped up for another few days?"

"I'm trying not to think about it."

They spend the rest of the morning over the map of Ferelden Alistair keeps, one of the few things he had with him in his pack after Ostagar. The line of the Frostbacks isn't very detailed, some villages aren't even listed, but Morrigan points out the approximate locations of settlements she's seen from the sky that might be abandoned like this one, and good places to stay a night.

The afternoon and evening sees all of them around the fire, exchanging stories. Some members of the crew are particularly good at it—Leliana is practiced as a bard and knows dozens of legends, Morrigan has strange stories of the wilds and a lilt in her voice that is nice to follow, and Zevran has enough salacious details to make his 'professional anecdotes' fascinating. Others are... less so. Sten tells them a story that is entirely descriptions of combat formations, while George dozes off on Alistair's shoulder. Shale has a rather gruesome and explicit tale about murdering pigeons in several creative ways.

When it comes 'round to Alistair, he's surprised they're looking at him at all. "I haven't got anything interesting to tell," he says. "Really."

"You must," George says. "What about when you were traveling with the Wardens, before Ostagar?"

He doesn't often talk about it, because it's a bit painful, but in this cozy little room, where it feels like nothing can come through the snow and hurt them, he thinks it won't be so bad.

"Well, maybe I should tell you about my first time in the Deep Roads?"

"If you try to tell us you slayed an ogre all on your own, I shan't believe it," Morrigan warns him.

"No, I didn't learn to do that until Ostagar," Alistair says.

George nods. "He *did* do that at Ostagar. Jumped right at it. I stared for so long, one of them hit me in the face. Knocked a tooth out."

Alistair makes a little noise of mock affront. "Are you blaming *me* for that tooth, now?"

"Sure. If you weren't being so dashing and handsome, it'd still be in my face."

"If the two of you are simply going to flirt instead of actually sharing a tale," Morrigan says, pitched loud to cover over their bickering, "we must recover another bottle of something from the pantry. For that is the only way I will abide by your nonsense without gagging."

"Ah." Alistair can feel himself blushing. "I was hoping everybody had forgotten about last night."

Zevran is sitting on the floor this time, between Alistair's left leg and George's right. He tips his head back onto the couch cushion and says, "it would take a much larger quantity of booze to drive that many people to a state at which they cannot remember the preceding night. Especially if it comes with a show like *that*."

Alistair bops his knee against Zevran's head on purpose. Wynne is looking at them suspiciously. Sten seems deeply bored. "Any way," Alistair says. "My first trip into the deep roads. So, they warn you about a lot of things in advance, right, but here's the thing they always forget to mention: the air down there, it's completely still. So the *smells*..."

He continues his story with what he hopes is enough gruesome detail to please the more violently-minded members of their crew, enough jokes to make Wynne smile and George laugh, and enough adventure to keep Zevran and Leliana's attention. Morrigan probably hates it by verdict of it

being a story Alistair is telling, but there's no pleasing everybody. All the heroics in this particular tale go to Duncan, who led this expedition with some senior Wardens that George never got the pleasure of working alongside. Alistair was just a bumbling recruit trying his best to keep up.

Not so, anymore. When they run into battle now, he *is* the front line, with George by his side more and more often as she becomes more confident with her blade.

He's looking at her, thinking about tracing his thumb over the scattering of freckles that bridges her nose. She takes it as an indication that she's meant to be talking. "My turn, then?"

"Oh, yeah, nothing much happened after that," Alistair says. "I mean, obviously I woke up, had a *huge* bruise on my forehead for weeks."

"I *knew* you'd been dropped on the head," Morrigan says.

"Cheeky." Alistair would kick her if she weren't halfway across the room, sitting cross-legged atop the dining table. "Sorry, George, go ahead."

"I don't have a lot of interesting stories that the lot of you haven't been there for already," she says, to scattered laughter from the group. "But I thought maybe I could tell you how I became a Warden?"

Alistair knows bits and pieces of this story, but not how it all fits together. She describes her Harrowing first, which sounds terrifying even to a person who's had more contact with the Fade than any other average non-magical man. Morrigan, a mage who has never been Harrowed, looks particularly appalled with the practice.

"The thing you must understand," George says, after mentioning her friend Jowan, who Alistair has met, and who caused all sorts of trouble, really, "is that magic is genetic, and all my siblings are mages, too. My elder brother and sister were both sent to different Circle towers, and I don't know about my younger brother. I never learnt what became of him. But when I was apprenticed, there was this boy the same age as my brother, a year younger than me, and he was shy and scared just like Peter always was, and I was...

obliged, somehow, to keep watch over him. So I adopted him. Sort of. It was a terrible idea in hindsight, and I *hope* no brother of mine was ever as much of a headache to somebody as Jowan was to me."

Alistair can't help but laugh at that, and again at her impersonation of a love-struck Jowan who fell for a woman whose voice George imitates as an overly emotional quaver and *swears* she's doing an accurate impersonation.

She looks a bit guilty in Wynne's direction as she tells them about the plan to escape the Circle, as if she'd be scolded. Then, he realizes the true reason for that chagrin. "I mentioned something about them to Irving, and he caught me in it. Realized what they were going to do. For a moment, I thought he'd just stop them, but then... he asked me to catch them for him. Jowan had been acting strangely and Knight Commander Greagoir had recommended him for tranquility upon suspicion of blood magic, but if we could prove he was just trying to run away with a girl, and especially if that girl was a Chantry sister and not another mage..."

"Punishments do tend to be less severe when one of the Chantry's own is involved," Wynne says, in a way that speaks of experience.

"I thought I was *helping* them," George says, in a way that sounds very helpless. "I thought it was better than being hunted down by templars and tranquilized. But then he was *actually a blood mage*, and... they thought I must be involved."

Alistair squeezes her knee. "But Duncan got you out, right?"

"Yeah." She nods, and a little smile comes on her face. "It was strange being out of the tower. I didn't even remember seeing the world from the other shore of that lake. I must have, I would have been old enough to remember, too, but maybe I didn't pay attention, because I never thought I'd be trapped somewhere like the Circle. I got excited over silly things—dogs and horses and cows. It was like... it was like I'd been reading about the world in books for years and years, and then I finally got to see it for myself and everything was even brighter and wider than I expected. Wait, no. It wasn't *like* that, it *was* that."

"And I'll be eternally glad Duncan took you from there," Alistair says. "I mean, we all will. Everyone will. Especially once we rid the world of the Archdemon, hey?"

Zevran makes a long, despairing sigh. "My friend Alistair," he says, which is the way he begins conversations when he's going to follow through with something that will make Alistair unlikely to wish to be his friend at all, "we are all well aware of your love affair with our dear Georgie. You can simply say you're happy Duncan recruited her because you are glad to have met her, because otherwise you would never have fallen in love with her, and you never would have—what was that euphemism you said about the... lamp posts?"

"Al *right*," Alistair says. "That's enough out of you."

George pats his hand. "I love you too, Alistair."

"*Maker*." Alistair's so red it's almost as if he'd been drinking again. "Someone else go, please."

— — —

They're able to leave on the third day, which is good, because George is going a bit stir-crazy. She spent all of yesterday mixing up potions and poultices for the road, and last night she'd kissed the living daylight out of Alistair, all while telling him everything she'd do to him if they were the only two in the house.

She's quite inventive.

He's never had somebody's fingers where she's suggesting, and if you asked him before, he'd say it sounds absolutely disgusting, but she makes it seem quite... desirable.

Maker *take* him, but he needs to get her alone. He has her, yes, they're constantly in each other's space, and their affections have become all the more obvious and visible after they broke the unspoken status quo of not

kissing one another in front of people. But she's just as desperate for him as he is for her, and they've no chance to work those particular frustrations out.

Unfortunately, the rest of their journey progresses much like the beginning, and he does not manage to get her alone all the way along the Frostbacks. It's too chilly to camp, and all their tents are packed in the wagons that they've yet to regroup with, anyhow. They're in and out of inns, always sharing rooms between groups of three and four, and then they rest at another abandoned one-room house and a few village chantries, where their strange group is usually given a wide berth until Leliana can placate the mothers with her sweet words and big blue eyes.

They reach the gates of Orzammar and are immediately thrown into political turmoil so twisted and confusing, Alistair can hardly bring himself to enjoy the fact that they're experiencing a city, a history, and a culture that few humans (or elves or qunari) ever get to see.

George is angry because nobody but the few veterans of the Deep Roads they come across seems to care about the Blight. Those in power just want the Wardens' assistance in doing their dirty work, and honestly, to Alistair's eye, neither the prince nor the lord seem to be great people, exactly.

He knows she's gonna throw her support behind the prince, if anybody, because Bhelen Aeducan seems to actually care about those on the margins of dwarven society, and he can tell George shares sympathies with the casteless dwarves. She, too, has been pushed to the edges, not considered a proper citizen of Ferelden, just because of how she was born. And Alistair follows, he really does feel sympathy for these people, it's just...

It's just that Leliana is taking all these bloody politics and using them to attempt to convince Alistair that he'd make just a fantastic king.

Which he wouldn't.

Obviously.

The dwarves have their troubles, yes, but Alistair wants as far from it as possible. The Wardens are supposed to be politically neutral, it was one of

the many things Alistair liked about being one. He'd much rather go hunting around for nugs all day, thanks. He'd even take the Deep Roads.

He shouldn't have said he'd even take the Deep Roads.

"We're going down tomorrow," George tells them all. Prince Bhelen was kind enough (or wanted their help enough) to give them all rooms at a local inn in the Diamond Quarter. It's a suite, really, with several bedrooms oriented around a central chamber, and it's very nice, even if the beds are quite short for somebody Alistair's size. And George's size. He can't imagine how Sten's faring. "Alistair, do you have any suggestions?"

Right. Because he's the only one who's been down there.

He provides the basics: stay away from Darkspawn blood unless you're already tainted (or you don't have flesh, yes, Shale), always expect the unexpected, mark your path carefully so you don't get lost in the endless wend of the tunnels, and never part from your group.

He doesn't realize he's being remarkably sullen and somber until he's alone in the bedroom with George and she asks him what's wrong.

"I—nothing," he says, out of habit.

She frowns at him like she would be crossing her arms if she wasn't braiding her hair. It's hot down here in Orzammar, surrounded by such terrifying wells of magma, and George is wearing her smallclothes and nothing else, standing in front of the bureau and looking at him in its reflection. "What's *wrong*, Alistair?" she repeats.

This time, he doesn't defer. "I'm worried." He strips off his own shirt and trousers, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I'm... *scared* to take them all down into the Deep Roads. Everybody's looking to me because I'm the only one with any experience here, but I barely made it through last time I went to the Deep Roads. I was *concussed*."

"And you're ten times the warrior you were back then," George says. "We'll be alright, love." She swings her braid back over her shoulder and comes to

sit beside him. When she has one knee on the bed, she pauses, considering. Then she slips back and re-settles herself with one knee between Alistair's legs, sitting astride his thigh.

It's no great feat to stretch up to kiss her. Easy as breathing. Maker, but he feels like he could do anything at her side. Maybe even be king, if he really had to (he still doesn't want that). But she wouldn't be at his side, then. Because mages can't be queen.

"Georgie," he says, clasping tight around her waist and putting his forehead on her shoulder. "I don't want any of this political nonsense to happen to me. I don't want to be in the middle of some sort of struggle for the throne, I don't want a *throne* at all." Even to his own mind, he sounds like a petulant child saying he doesn't want the vegetables on his plate.

She doesn't treat him that way, though. She just strokes the back of his neck and says, "I won't let that happen, not if I can help it."

When she makes promises to him like that, it's like nothing in the world could ever hurt him. "Okay," he says, resting there a moment longer, where she has him and he's safe. "Okay."

When he leans his head back, she's smiling at him. "Alistair," she says. "I can't help but notice, this is the first we've been alone in *several weeks*."

She's testing the waters of flirting, maybe to see if his foul mood has passed, maybe because it's a bit awkward getting back to it when in the past month or so of travel, the most they've done is kiss and curl up against one another every night. Sure, they've been *good* kisses, and it's wonderful to cuddle her after the end of every day, but they've kept the... steamy bits to a minimum.

Because, honestly, he doesn't think he'd be able to handle himself if she *really* kissed him. He'd have to say, '*yes, I know we're staying the night in a chantry, but damn that all, let's go find some quiet space in the library to relieve some of this tension*'.

Because *Maker*, there's tension.

He feels almost like he had right before their first kiss, when everything in him felt like it was boiling whenever she so much as looked at him. His heart is pounding like it had after his first fumbling attempts at flirting with her. But it's *worse* now, because he knows how good it is to hold her in his arms, to *have* her, and he hasn't been able to for *weeks*.

She takes his silence for hesitation. "We don't have to do anything in particular about that, if you don't want to."

"No, that's not what I'm—it's not that. It's just. I was thinking about your hands—your *fingers*, you, you know, what we had talked about—"

"Fucking you?"

George has a proper sort of voice. It's stern when she's saying anything harsh, musical when she's saying anything soft. And when she's saying *dirty* things to Alistair, it's the most sensual thing he ever has the pleasure of hearing.

"Yes, love," he says. "Please."

She presses her mouth to his ear and says, "then go wash up for me."

He does, and then she kisses him and gets him under her on the bed and grinds until he's almost forgotten what they intend to do. He's only clued back in when she picks up a bottle of oil, a different vial from the one she uses on her hair.

She explains herself carefully as she slicks her fingers. "I'm going to start with one, and it's going to feel a bit strange. You must tell me if it hurts, and if it's too uncomfortable and you'd rather stop, we can. But if you push through the discomfort a bit, it can feel good—so say the, er, experts."

"Zevran?"

"Well, yes. I'm certain there were plenty of men doing this to one another at the Circle, too, but I wasn't that well acquainted with them."

She's nervous, he can tell. She starts to get a little more formal than need be when she's anxious, venturing into over-explanation. He imagines it's a result of her schooling, but it doesn't matter now. All he can think of is how anxious *he* was the first time he fucked *her*, and how that all turned out fine, so this ought to as well.

"I'll be alright, dear heart," he says, passing his hand over her cheek. "I trust you'll make me feel good, and if it's not, I'll tell you."

So she fucks him.

It's not that simple really, but his brain can't really wrap around the complexities of it. She starts by just feeling him out, then she presses in, and it *does* feel weird but it doesn't hurt terribly—the only problem is, it's also not very arousing. Thus far, his arse has been mostly removed from sex, except when sometimes she squeezes his glutes, and there's no reason for his body to really be turned on by a finger up there.

And then she licks his cock. While she's moving her finger around in there.

However much his erection has flagged, it isn't an issue any longer, not with her breath and her lips and her tongue.

He's not surprised he really likes her mouth, but he *is* surprised he really likes her fingers even more now that she's got her mouth on him. It's like the two sensations twist together and combine into something delicious, unexpected in its overwhelm and jarring in its pleasure.

She never puts him into her mouth all the way, she's sort of figuring out how to do it as she goes, maybe, but the point is that *he* doesn't know any different and he feels *fantastic*.

"Another?"

He replies with a very astute, "mmngh?"

"Can I add another finger?"

"*Oh*. Yes, yeah, let's try it."

She does, and it's more of a stretch, but it's not as weird as the first one. And then she fucks him a little bit deeper and then she *curls* them and he sucks in a breath like he's been shocked.

"Sorry," she says.

"No—I mean, don't be. That was *good*."

"Oh?" She tries it again.

"*Ohfuckyes*."

He doesn't know *why* it's so much better. Maybe it's because she's worked him up to it, in the same way that stroking his cock wouldn't do much for him if he wasn't otherwise aroused.

He doesn't really care, at present. All he can focus on is the feeling of her fingers inside him. She's not licking his cock anymore, doesn't need to, this is enough. Plus, she's found something better to do with her mouth.

"Look at you—you're so pretty like this, all messed up and begging for more." She presses a kiss to the curve of his hip. "I've wanted to make you come for weeks, it's been too long, hasn't it?"

"*Yeah—!*"

"Our situation, y'know, doesn't leave much room for romance. Wish it did — *fuck*, Alistair, I want to take you, I dunno, somewhere, somewhere I can have you to myself for *days*. I'll hide all our trousers so we'll have to walk around half naked."

It's a silly fantasy, and definitely not something that could ever happen during the ongoing Blight, but Alistair says, "you can *burn* them for all I care."

"Alistair," she says, "do you want to come like this or do you want me to ride you?"

“Like this,” he says, without even thinking. “Just—could you, with your other hand, while your fingers are—Maker, I can’t—“

“C’mon.” Her voice lilts, cajoling. “You can say the dirty things, Alistair, I’d love to hear them.”

“Touch me! Please...” he’s *dreadfully* whiny.

“Where?” She’s touching him now, sure, but it’s just his thigh, her hand running back and forth in a way that would be nice and soothing if he could think about anything other than how he wants her *elsewhere*.

He levers himself up onto his elbows so he can see her better. The firelight makes her eyes sparkle and she’s grinning so wide he can see where her tooth was knocked out.

“I want,” he says, his voice a tremulous rasp, “I want you to touch my cock. While you fu— *hah*, while you *fuck me*.”

She kisses his stomach, just below where his ribs stand out with how hard he’s breathing. “Good boy.”

All told, the two sensations combined are... very nearly too much.

He doesn’t think he’s ever come this hard.

When he realizes she’s touching herself (with the hand she’d been stroking his cock with, which is going to turn him on at some inconvenient time when he thinks of it later) he tugs at her wrist. “Can I?”

“Yeah,” she says, “please.”

He pushes two fingers in and fucks her ‘til she’s grinding forward into his palm, so wet that just fucking her is making all of these *noises*.

She leans in and kisses him, and when she comes, he can feel all the breath rush out of her at once.

“Thank you,” she says, and then, “I love you,” and those two sentiments sound much the same.

— — —

Their first trip into the Deep Roads is uneventful, for the most part. Lots of darkspawn, some treasure, and, at the end of the road, the deshyr they're looking for, because they've been made into a bunch of over-glorified errand boys settling dwarven property disputes.

Their *second* trip into the Deep Roads, on the trail of a lost Paragon, is pretty much a blow-for-blow example of why everybody says to stay out of the Deep Roads.

Spiders. More spiders. Golems, and not the arguably-sometimes-friendly types like Shale. An insane dwarf living off darkspawn meat who is actually quite personable once he decides George is pretty and is not going to hurt him (Alistair is going to try telling her she smells like the rocks behind a waterfall sometime. He thinks she'll punch him). Enormous spider queens that summon even more spiders to the middle of their spidery nests.

The *fucking archdemon*. When he sees it fly past, his heart sinks. George grips his arm so tight he's got bruises. Alistair thinks he's lightening the mood when he says, "well. Now we'll not be the only ones having nightmares about his face, hey, George?" but the others look far too pale and drawn for that to be anything but an accurate statement.

There are two separate ambushes on two separate bridges and so many darkspawn that no one could ever keep track. There are spirits after their blood. More flesh walls. Another insane dwarf, more obviously tainted this time.

There's a *broodmother*. Eugh.

George is brave enough to jump on top of the broodmother to finish it off with a deadly strike Alistair taught her, and when it tumbles forward in a heap of floppy flesh and tentacles, she launches herself neatly off it, landing on one knee on the filthy, strangely springy ground. She kicks a tentacle off

her foot, and only then does she stagger and look a bit like she's going to be sick.

They meet back up with their contingent of dwarves, and head through the newly-cleared chambers together. When they pass the broodmother, now looking even more saggy and disgusting, Oghren unleashes a stream of curses so filthy, the broodmother looks as sparkling clean as Alistair's blade after a polish by comparison. It's kind of impressive, honestly.

There's a bit of a clearing after that, and then a wide chamber where they find *her*. Branka. And she's *insane*. Alistair was pretty sure of this at the beginning of her conversation, but when she says she *let* her lover be tainted by the broodmothers just so she would birth more darkspawn with which to test a gauntlet of traps? Yeah. Insane.

They have a brief conversation which goes something like, "*I know she's your wife and you love her,*" from George, and then, "*no, she's crazy and she needs to go down,*" from Oghren.

George turns her head to Alistair and says, "if I ever go that completely batshit, you had best respond like him."

"Please don't ever do that," Alistair begs, wanting to hug her and settling for a hand on her hip. "Please, George, I don't even want to think of it."

Oghren's mustache bristles as he wrinkles his nose. "Ugh. Can't you two girls just say '*goodbye, don't let a rock fall on your head and kill 'ya,*' and go?" (Oghren had great fun in joking, when he first met Alistair, that Alistair *must* be a woman because he had no beard. The joke held water when Alistair was clean-shaven, but after a few weeks in the Deep Roads, there's really nothing funny about it anymore.)

George explains, "In dwarvish, '*don't let a rock fall on your head and kill 'ya,*' means, '*I love you.*'"

"That's—okay, that's sweet, but what do you mean *goodbye*?" Alistair asks.

"I need you to stay with them," she says. "I don't know what other shit is in here, and I want a Warden with both groups, so we can at least see the darkspawn coming."

"George." He might have some separation anxiety. It's warranted. Ever since Ostagar, they've not been apart for a single mission. "You can't. What if you get hurt?"

"I'll have Wynne." She put a hand on the back of his neck, and pressed her forehead to his. They're both dirty, and he thinks she's got dried blood on her brow, so there's a layer of grit between them, but it still feels right. "We'll be okay. I need you to take care of everybody. That's my order as your fellow Warden. But, I wish I could have you with me—that's my selfish desire, as your partner."

They'd decided on 'partner'. The ambiguity of it wasn't a problem as soon as literally anybody saw them around one another.

"Be careful," he says.

She kisses him.

Oghren loudly spits from somewhere close by.

He lets her go, and he hopes she'll be okay.

— — —

They gather everybody up after the battle is over, and when Alistair comes through into the room at the very end of the tunnels, he can see Oghren sitting there, facing decidedly away from Branka's body, his head in his hands. There are dead golems all around, like so many boulders, and a *massive* suit of armor that's forging what looks like a helmet but is, as George explains, a crown to be given to the future king.

She's holding newly broken ribs, which Wynne eventually heals, once she regains enough mana. There are veins of lyrium all over the place, but

they're drained and dead from the battle, so Wynne has to recover her mana the old fashioned way.

George is all fixed up by the time the crown is finished and the suit of armor (who turns out to be the Paragon Caridin himself) has said his final goodbyes. The anvil is waiting there, ready to be sundered.

She blasts it with ice first to freeze it enough to make it brittle, and then she lifts a hammer and...

CRACK!

A piece of incredible technology, used and misused for hundreds of years, responsible for the creation of one of their closest friends (though Shale would probably never call herself anybody's friend) is split asunder. Nobody else will ever have their life drained on the Anvil of the Void.

Alistair's not going to say anything, because it's not the right time, but she looks *damn* good doing it.

— — —

The coronation goes alright. The best part of it is after, when they're in the newly crowned king's chambers and George tells him, "great. Bravo. Where are my troops?"

Alistair will never love anyone as much as he loves her.

On the heels of all that, they find out definitively that Shale was once *squishy*, and they walk through the overgrown but startlingly *green* old thaig where once her dwarven feet walked. Alistair was imagining her as a crotchety older dwarven woman with her same stone's-rasp of a voice, who smoked a pipe and swung one of those enormous hammers instead of stone fists.

It's a much nicer Deep Roads adventure than the last, but he's still so, so glad to take his first breath of breezy, *moving* air above the surface.

Then, George hits him with, "we have to go back to the Circle."

He trips down the stairs out of Orzammar.

— — —

This time, they don't take a night of R&R before they cross the lake. The ferry is running as normal. It's a bright, sunny afternoon, and George doesn't look like she's cowering in the shadow of the tower this time.

On the land surrounding the Circle, there is a monument to the mass grave of everybody they lost. George can't quite look at it. Wynne pauses before it and clasps her hands before her chest in front of the stone. Alistair doesn't know if she's praying, or just remembering.

George walks through the doors to the Circle with little apprehension. Having the Circle as allies and having Wynne fully accept George's place as a Grey Warden seems to make George confident she's never going to be trapped here again.

That confidence is not lost on that one templar, whatever-his-name-is, the one with the bags under his eyes and the curly hair, who stammers that he wishes he could have come with them to help fight the Blight. "Would that I could fight by your side, that I could *help* with all this—"

"Yes, thank you, Cullen, you're helping plenty just being here. *Please* just tell me where Irving is, I need to ask him something," George says, quite clipped with him.

The reason they're here is to ask Irving if Dagna of Orzammar can study at the Circle. It is undoubtedly sweet that George wants one dwarf to be able to accomplish her dreams, and would go out of her way to ensure that it happens. She says it's not just that, that the Circle could benefit from somebody with an outside perspective, but Alistair knows she also just likes Dagna. They send a courier from the Circle to Orzammar to collect the girl, and Alistair is certain they're going to receive a letter gushing thanks from a certain young dwarf after a while.

It's a cheerful way to start their progression to Redcliffe and then Denerim, but things don't remain quite so sunny. For one, they're traveling with

Eamon and all his men, which is quite dangerous, because a significantly large and armored party is more likely to draw attention from the darkspawn, which are becoming more numerous by the day.

But that's not the worst of it. Alistair would fight dozens of darkspawn. Hundreds.

What he can't abide by was the fact that, at present, he and George are pretending they aren't romantically involved.

The basis of it makes sense. George said she wants Eamon to see the logic of her arguments against putting Alistair on the throne. She doesn't want him to hear her just as a fretting lover who doesn't want her partner to be hurt.

But *Maker*, every bit of Alistair aches for her.

They'd camped the full first week, and she'd bunked with Leliana, like she used to back at the start of this whole endeavor. Every morning they greet each other yawning and half-asleep, because they don't rest as easily apart from one another. When she looks at him with that little sympathetic smile and says, "rough night?" all he wants is to hold her.

It's been one damn week. How is he going to handle the entire trip to Denerim? It'll be *Spring* before he can kiss her again. He's freezing without her. He's *dying*.

"You look like a pup that's been left out in the rain," Wynne tells him.

"Oh, yeah, no surprises there," he says. He hopes Eamon will just blame any moodiness on how much Alistair does not want to be involved in this Landsmeet. "I... you know how it is." He clears his throat.

Wynne hums softly. "Tonight, I think it would behoove us to send out some scouts in the area around the camp site. I believe yourself and Georgiana would be best for that duty, seeing that you are the two Wardens among us."

Normally, it'd be something he'd complain about. Hiking around at night and possibly coming across darkspawn in the woods? No, thank you. But today? Yeah, he can handle it.

Alistair hugs Wynne so hard he sweeps her off her feet. "Yes! Thank you, that's *perfect*."

"You'd think I was giving you a gift, not asking you to do a chore. You *do* still have to do a perimeter check, much as I'm sure you would enjoy simply spending time by her side."

"I know, I know. Still, though. It's... been difficult."

Wynne smooths out her robes where he's wrinkled them. "It always is," she says. "Putting on a front that you bear no affection for somebody is difficult for the best of liars. And you—this is a *good* thing, don't worry—are not the best of liars."

"You don't have to tell me that," he says.

"You'll be alright." Wynne's like George, almost, in the way that her reassurances feel real, and not put on. He's never telling George that Wynne reminds him of her, though. That's not the sort of thing you tell your girlfriend. "You don't have to be so separate from her. The two of you are comrades and close friends, besides. No one will think anything of it if you talk, and Georgiana is like most Circle mages in that she is very hands-on with people. You may not look as singled out in her affections as you feel."

That was what made it difficult. "I fear I will give myself away if I get close enough," he says. It was in the thousands of little everyday touches that passed between them which were all far too blatantly romantic to hide, even from somebody like Eamon, who didn't have any particular understanding of Alistair's potential romantic entanglements. If left to his own devices, Alistair would sit on the ground beside George with his head leaning against her thigh, or she'd rest a hand on the back of his neck while they talked. He likes to play with her hair when it's loose, and he's actually getting quite good at braiding it for her.

They're really quite obvious, that's the problem.

"Then at least you will have tonight." Wynne pats him on the forearm.

"How *ever* am I to thank you?"

"You could start," she says, "by ensuring that no more of your clothes find their way into my laundry *or* my mending basket."

"A hard ask," he sighs, "but I'll see what I can do."

— — —

Georgie meets him at the edge of the clearing they're camped in, re-buckling her gauntlets and tracing her fingers along the runes inscribed in them. "Ready?" she asks, her voice carefully neutral.

"Ready," he agrees. He wonders if this is going to be like when they finally got some alone time in Orzammar, if they'll be a little awkward before they finally come back together.

Instead, there's a *constant* stream of chatter passing back and forth between the two of them, like everything they've not been able to say to one another in the past week comes out at once. Alistair tells her about Wynne's moratorium on laundry and/or mending his clothes for him, and George tells Alistair about the scores of exceedingly boring lectures on politics and stories about the glory days Eamon has spent time regaling her with.

"It's as if he's trying to make me memorize a list of every noble in Ferelden, so that I can impress them all with my knowledge of personal anecdotes I have no real reason to know."

He laughs, hooking his fingers in the side strap of her armor and pulling her close to him. "You think he's going to quiz you on them?"

"*Maker*, I hope not. I was always terrible at rote memorization."

"You need to make up a song, like the one for remembering all the Canticles in order."

"I can't remember the song for remembering the Canticles," she says, but he thinks she's just being stubborn.

"Do you want me to sing it?"

"I want you to—wait, hang on, something's moving over there."

It's a bear, not a darkspawn, and it's smart enough to turn and run when George shapeshifts into a bigger bear, stands up, and roars.

When she pops back to human form, she's cackling. "I've always wanted to do that," she says. "Can't believe it worked. Anyhow, do you sense any darkspawn, Alistair?"

He gives a cursory look around just for show, but he can't see *or* sense anything, and he's brimming with anticipation for what they'll do now that the important part of their job is over. "I do not."

"Good, neither do I. Then I suppose we'd best get back." She turns on her heel and starts to walk away.

"George!"

She *has* to be messing with him. She must be. She *is*.

"George, come on, they won't miss us for a while longer."

She pretends not to hear him.

She's *definitely* messing with him. And she can't keep it up for long. She whirls back around, takes two running steps toward him, and then pulls them together with a crash he can't really feel, because they're both armored.

He can feel her mouth on his, though. She kisses him like the archdemon itself could land ten yards away and she wouldn't pull back. The ironbark of her breastplate is smooth under his hands and the buckles of her gauntlets pinch at one of his ears accidentally, but he can't bring himself to care.

He runs his fingers down the back of her head, over the knots of the fancy Orlesian braid Leliana put in her hair. He winds the tail of that braid around his hand, not to pull, just to hold onto her.

He's hot like a *forge* and he's backed himself up against a tree, with her pressed to his front, an answering heat.

He wants her to do *everything*. He wants her to flip their positions and make him drop to his knees for her. He wants her to press him back against the bark and strip off all his armor, his clothes, until he's bare and she's battle-ready.

They have no time for anything so elaborate. They only barely manage to get enough clothes out of the way that they can touch one another, the night air chilly wherever skin is revealed.

(He's a bit glad for the chill, actually. If not for that, he might have come faster than he ever has, as soon as she puts her hand on his cock.)

"I've been wanting this," she says, "wanting you."

"Yeah—I— *oh!*"

Her breath is hot against his ear. "Have you been thinking about me? All alone in your tent, your hands on yourself?"

He laughs raggedly, tilts his head just enough to find her lips. "It would be really sexy if I told you I was, right, like if I said I was covering my mouth to keep from moaning your name." He cups her sex through her trousers, then pulls at her laces. "But, uh, I've actually been way too tired to do that."

"*Hah,*" she says, and it's less a laugh and more a moan because he's just got his hand in her pants, "would that we traded places, at least. I've been all wound up since we haven't had a good, hard *fight* in weeks—" when she says 'fight' it sounds like 'fuck', "—and Leliana's a light sleeper."

“Have you been, er. Thinking about what we might do once we get in a proper bed again?”

She leans her forehead against his, and grins in this secretive little way. “Of course I have,” she says. “Get me off, and I’ll tell you.”

He says, “yes, sir,” which is *definitely* the right answer. She shivers, and arches into his touch, grinding against his palm.

His fingers still feel a bit clumsy while he does this, especially since her trousers are still a bit in the way, but as long as he moves fast and uses firm enough pressure, and kisses her while he does it, she seems *very* happy.

“*Maker*, you’re wet—is this what it’s like every night?”

“Yeah.”

“That must be hard—I mean. Difficult. I’m not trying to make puns while I —“

She laughs, with breathless abandon. “It’s alright. I hear denial makes it better when you finally—“

She cuts herself off, and so he slows his movements. “When you finally?” he prompts her.

“*Alistair if you don’t fuck me right now—“*

It is not, he gathers, the time for teasing.

When she comes, she bites his neck, and the sharp burst of pain makes him groan, but it’s not bad, exactly. He keeps stroking her afterward, gentle, until she’s pulling away from his hand instead of pushing into him.

He licks his fingers clean like he’s got sugar icing on them.

She tells him she’s tired of being flat against the tree bark, but instead of swapping their positions, she just comes ‘round behind him, instructing him

to put his hands on the tree trunk and not to move while she plays with him.

George has a way with words.

He's seen her silver tongue open doors, convince people to stand down from a fight, coax their allies into getting along. But it's never been more effective than when she's telling him, in the most explicit terms one could picture, what she wants to do to him when next they have a bit more free time to go at one another.

She wraps her arms around him while she does it, one hand opening his trousers to return his touches in kind, the other over his chest. He wishes he could strip out of his armor and his shirt, have her hands on his skin, but the pressure is still good, the weight of her against his back is still good.

He squeezes his eyes shut and turns his head to muffle his cries in his shoulder when he comes.

He sleeps better that night than he's slept all week, and in the morning, he's got the hot, achy pressure of a bruise on the side of his neck that bumps into his armor if he moves wrong. He doesn't mind it.

— — —

They spend the rest of the journey like that, keeping a distance between one another in camp only to come together in a furious crush of lips against lips and body against body as soon as they found time alone. It's fine, yes, but it's... wearing on him. He misses the quiet moments, waking up beside her, sitting pressed together on night watches.

George's strategizing with Eamon (which Alistair attended when he was made to) was not going as well as it might. Eamon could not be convinced that Cailan's widow, the *current queen*, might in fact make a good ruler. There was a sick part of Alistair that found it painfully ironic how Eamon had spent all his life *not* treating him like a real son, and only now, he was trying to cement Alistair's rule with an almost fatherly concern.

Along the way, they came across a group of Circle mages and then a group of Dalish hunters, all people who had been recruited by George to assist in the Grey Wardens' efforts to stop the Blight. They were headed, as George had requested when negotiating the treaties, to Soldier's Peak, an old fortress they'd cleared out early on in the journey for use as a Warden base. Alistair recalls not being very focused at all on that particular mission, as it had come right before his unfortunate first meeting with Goldanna, and he'd been quite anxious. But he likes the Drydens, and Levi, who runs the whole operation, has a good head on his shoulders, and also thinks George is the most incredible person to ever wear the Wardens' crest.

So he's good good judgment, then. Alistair likes him alright, and thinks the Drydens will be able to keep everyone supplied and operations running in the old keep long enough for the Landsmeet to blow through.

They reach Denerim in the muddy grays of spring, the rain turning the market into one big puddle that wets the hems of ladies' dresses and soaks into your boots. It's possibly the worst time of year to be in Denerim, and not just because it reminds Alistair of the last time he was here with Arl Eamon. He'd been a boy of only about seven then, tagging along behind Eamon when allowed, but left at the estate whenever anything really important was going on. He remembers sitting in the dining room one night for hours by himself, because nobody was there to dismiss him from supper.

They changed everything in the dining room since then. The table where that lonely boy sat isn't there anymore, but the cold stone walls are still the same. Alistair hides in the library. He used to be allowed there because it was the only area where he'd stay quiet, if he could get his nose into some book on history, preferably with a lot of knights and battles.

The books, he finds, are mostly the same.

"There you are."

It's George, but she's not given herself away with the metallic clink of her armor or the heavy footfalls of her boots. That's because she's not *wearing* armor, and if she has boots on, they're quieted by layers of heavy skirts.

She's in a *dress*— actually, when it's that fancy, Alistair thinks it's called a *gown*. It's a medium gray-blue, not the rich, saturated colors she prefers, trimmed in gold and gathered in at the waist to be very... bosom-forward.

"Got you dressed for dinner, have they?" He knows some of the estate staff have been hounding Morrigan, trying to get her into proper clothes, but little do they know, Morrigan has been celebrating the warmer weather by going back to wearing the most improper clothes she has, looking exactly like the scary swamp witch everyone is terrified of. "You look very pretty."

George rolls her eyes and sticks out her hands, as if to show him the full magnificence of her new wardrobe. "*Look* at this dress, though!" she says. "How am I supposed to use my sword?" She flaps her hands, making the trailing sleeves look a bit like wings. "And any spells? I'd set my *sleeves* on fire!"

He doesn't exactly think she's meant to be taking on scores of darkspawn in her dinner wear. Clearly, they'd not gotten to her hair yet; she doesn't have it bound up in the elaborate braids that Ferelden ladies prefer. Instead, it's long and loose, with one braid down the center back, which he sees when she does a spin to show him the whole dress.

He steps closer to her, drawing a hand over her hair and pulling a loose lock of it between his thumb and forefinger. "So... do you want to take it off?" He's confident enough to pitch his voice low, seductive, and he knows she catches it when he sees her dimples indent with a smile she's trying to stifle.

"You're not looking at the sleeves at all, are you?" she asks.

He traces his fingers over the sweep of her collarbones. "Sorry, dearheart," he says, "want me to get a really low-cut tunic? Even things out a bit?"

She's not in boots, he realizes, because he *is*, so there's more than the usual two-inch height difference between them. "You could do," she says. "You know how I feel about your chest."

"You know how I feel about how you feel about my chest." There's that heat between them, crackling away as steady as the fire in the grate. His hands

smooth down her waist. The fabric here is thick, but it's not as thick as armor, so he can feel the curves of her body, the strength that lies beneath the engraved metal she wears every day.

A polite clearing of a throat causes them to split apart. It's not Eamon, thank the Maker, just Leliana, but Alistair is suddenly reminded that they are in a public space in Eamon's estate, and this is probably *more* risky than being close to one another on the road.

"I thought the two of you would like to know that the arl is headed this way," Leliana says, "with Queen Anora's handmaiden in tow."

"I'm. Going to make myself scarce, if that's alright with you," he tells George.

She gives him a surprisingly regal nod. She doesn't look like a noble lady, not entirely, with her hair loose and her right ear studded with piercings and her hands marked with cuts and calluses. But she's lovelier for it. He kisses her quick before he scurries away.

She's still in the dress at dinner.

It's harder to become distracted by how lovely she looks, because they're busy discussing the fact that Loghain has been keeping his own daughter imprisoned in Arl Howe's estate. In the forefront of his mind, Alistair can't believe Loghain would go so far as to do something such as this to his own child, but in the background, well, he's desperate to find Anora because he knows she's his only chance at not being king. That is, if they can get Loghain out of the picture.

They're banking on Anora having grown less fond of her father after the whole imprisonment thing, because if they don't kill Loghain, George says, he's going to come back to haunt them. Or worse, he'll be a persistent presence in Anora's ear, guiding her hand the same way people keep suspecting Eamon would do to Alistair if he was crowned.

He's pretty sure if anybody can convince a woman to execute her own father for the good of the nation of Ferelden, though, it's George.

— — —

It's a stupid plan, sneaking in disguised as guards and then rescuing the queen, but it's one of those plans that's just stupid enough to work. Alistair thinks he looks all sort of nervy walking around nodding at the other guards like, *yes, mm-hmm, I'm definitely supposed to be here*, but if the turnover rate for Arl Howe's security detail is as high as its made out to be, it's possible he just looks like an anxious new hire.

It's all working great—freeing prisoners, killing the corrupt Arl, not getting lost in the labyrinthine prisons, which seem too much for one manor, honestly—and then they hit a force of twenty men trying to leave, headed by Ser Cauthrien.

Great.

George surrenders.

They must have a plan, right?

George lets them take her and Alistair, if the queen can go.

This is the plan?

They're cuffed and taken out of the estate, toward a padlocked wagon that looks very much like the sort that carts convicts to Fort Drakon.

This is a very bad, bad plan. Alistair is shooting pleading looks at George. Is she banking on the fact that they might not kill the only last remaining Grey Wardens, you know, because of the Blight? Alistair isn't sure that'll work. He knows Loghain is a pragmatist, but he wouldn't trust his life on it.

Cauthrien hands George a bottle of a wicked-looking purple-red potion. "Take this. All of it. Else someone will have to force you."

George eyes it suspiciously and then looks at Cauthrien. "Not while I'm standing up, I won't. You'll have to understand, Ser Cauthrien, I don't fancy a concussion atop the total loss of my mana."

It's *magebane*. And it's a *massive* dose, enough to sedate two mages, maybe three. More than they need for George, to be sure.

"You can't—" Alistair says.

"You really wouldn't expect us to take a mage prisoner without ensuring our own safety," Cauthrien says. Her hand drops to the sword at her belt. "Get on the wagon, and then drink it, then."

"That much isn't just going to *sedate* her, you *traitorous, bleeding*—" Alistair strains against his cuffs, and the guard who's in charge of him yanks them sharply. "You're going to *kill her*!" He can hear the rawness, the desperation in his own voice.

"I'll be fine," George says. She most certainly will not be.

"Don't *do* it, that stuff's too dangerous—"

"Shut him up!" Cauthrien barks, and it's the last thing Alistair hears for a while, because he gets a sharp knock on the head from somebody's pommel.

— — —

He wakes up to screaming.

It's a man, somebody who sounds like he's being tortured within an inch of death, and then that inch's gap must be closed, because the screaming cuts off.

Where's George?

Alistair's head is throbbing as he sits up, but he thinks he's escaped a concussion, because he's not dizzy or nauseated. He *is* cold, though, because they've stripped his armor *and* his clothes, because Cauthrien and the staff of Fort Drakon are the sick sort of folk who seem to think you can (and should) imprison somebody in just his smalls.

He's still slow to react, but he sees her sprawled out on the stone floor like a doll that's been abandoned by a forgetful child. For a terrifying moment, it's hard to tell if she's breathing.

She is, though, he just can't see it 'til he gets closer. She's got a pulse, too, when he feels for it in her wrist.

He rests a hand on her forehead. She's hot, and sweating a bit. It's how she gets when she runs out of mana, she says she burns out, she gets sort of feverish. It doesn't mean she's warm enough, actually, it means she's *losing* body heat, and she needs to be warmer. He pulls her into his arms, and it takes more effort than he's expecting. She's *completely* boneless. "Oh, come now, Georgie, they haven't broken you completely, have they?"

No answer.

"You'll wake up. She'll wake up." He's talking to himself, now. Never a good sign. He runs his hands down her arms and her back, trying to warm her up a little, wishing he had a blanket or something. George isn't wearing any more clothes than he is, which seems like more of an insult on her, because she's a *lady*, they should have at least kept her shirt on. Especially since she doesn't wear anything under.

She wouldn't care, though.

Except right now, she *can't* care, and that's what scares him.

"Someone's going to come for us," he tells her. "You'll see. Pudding. Pudding will come bounding in here, like in all the stories where a loyal mabari saves his master. And he'll bring Leliana, she could sneak past all the guards. Or Shale. I'd like to see the walls of Fort Drakon stand up to her."

He sighs, and kisses the top of her head.

"You'd best wake up to see this daring rescue. Maybe it'll be Zevran, he's always wanted to save a beautiful lady. Please, don't sleep through that. He'd cry."

It takes what feels like hours.

He just holds her, takes her hair down from the bun so she's at least a little bit warmer, buries his face against her shoulder and tries to ignore how horribly exposed he feels. They're not in a cell, they're in a fucking *cage*, and he can hear footsteps as guards come in and out. If George was awake, she'd probably start talking to them, maybe manage to convince them to let her out. She's wily like that. Alistair's never seen her talk herself out of prison before, but she's come close. You don't expect it with her, either, because she's so nice and so earnest, she makes you think you're doing the proper thing going along with her.

The first thing he feels is her head turning.

For a second, he thinks he's just shifted to the side and her head has lolled a bit, but then her face is lifting to his, and her hands start to move where they're trapped between his body and hers.

"George?"

She groans, and her head drops back down.

She's back out for a good long while before she wakes for real, but this time he's a bit more hopeful she'll wake soon. He even considers whistling really shrilly just to bother the guards with his general presence. But it might also bother George, so instead, he just waits.

"'listair?" Now *that's* exciting. That's almost an actual word. That's almost his actual *name*, which means she might know where she is and who she's with. Or she might just assume that somebody holding her means it's Alistair.

"Georgie? You're awake?"

"Nngh."

"Oh, we were doing so well, with the words and all," he sighs.

"Faaaauugh, what a weird sleep." She's still not really moving, except for her tongue, and her words are slurring like she's drunk.

"Why was it weird?" *Just keep talking*, he begs, silently. *Please, just talk to me.*

"No... dreams." She wiggles her head a little bit. "Like I was asleep but couldn't get to the Fade."

"Do you know where we are?" he asks. "Do you remember what happened?"

"Mm. That *arse*, Cauthrien, caught us for Loghain. Are we in the palace? It's fucking freezing." She lifts her head to meet his eye. "Why are we naked?"

"We're... no. They didn't take us to the palace. We're in Fort Drakon." As if to punctuate his revelation, somebody downstairs screams. This has been happening on and off while he waited for George to wake.

"Brilliant." George sighs. "I'll probably need another few hours before I get enough mana back to fight."

"And then?"

"If I can't kill a prison guard from thirty paces, I'm not half the mage I think."

"You're so *lovely* when you're dangerous." He places a little kiss against the side of her head. "But... there's a problem, there. I've seen... he has a mage walking around. Once you start recovering mana, he'll be able to sense it. They'll probably dose you again."

"Okay." She rests her ear against his chest, "so we've two options. How nice does the mage look? Would he help a fellow in need?"

"You can be quite convincing," Alistair told her. "But I imagine Loghain is paying him a *lot* not to help you out."

"So that one could be risky." She hums, folding her arms in what looks like an effort to keep a little warmer. "We go with option two, then."

"What's that?"

"You Silence me."

Those three words hang in midair, and they make Alistair grip her tighter just for worry as to how dire she must find their situation, if she's willing to let this happen. "Are you certain?" He knows she's been Silenced before. It happened when she was much younger, new to her powers and out of control. She was terrified for weeks after. She'd looked awful when she so much as told him, her mouth twisting, her voice going too quiet for comfort.

"Of course, I trust you," she says, somehow sounding confident but afraid at the edges. "Can you do it? Would you be able to keep it up for an hour or so if needed?"

"I'd have to meditate. But yeah, I think I could."

"Okay. How long will it take to get it started?"

He's never really done this for a *prolonged* amount of time; it wasn't part of his training even though Templars often have to, if magebane or another mage who knows how to drain mana isn't around. But if it's a matter of keeping her safe, he knows he'll do anything. "Few minutes to get in the right headspace, I think."

"Then do it now. I'm going to be strong enough that they'll sense it soon. I'll be quiet, I promise."

"You're *sure*—"

"Alistair. Wardens do what we must."

She hadn't known Duncan for long, but Maker, she bloody well learnt from him. Alistair strokes a hand over her hair, says a preemptive, "I'm sorry," and sinks into the state from which he can stifle her most innate power.

Lately, when he'd practiced this, it was just to shut down a blood mage long enough that one of the others could take them out. He didn't have time to hold their magic in his hand and look at it, and he didn't have to go seeking it out, in the first place. It was obvious, blooming from them, billowing out as they attempted to end his life with it. George isn't using her magic, and it's very weak, but he finds it within her, like a warm light at the middle of her chest. It's sharp at the edges, dangerous and lethal, but it's a protective force. It's what kept George alive all this time.

He knows immediately that if George had any more of her strength, he would not be able to Silence her. Even though she's weak, even though she's willing, she's *strong*.

He's not sure how long it lasts. He keeps his eyes shut, focusing on dimming that spark, like he's putting a bubble around it. She's trying to work with him, trying to let him, but the spark keeps growing, which means he has to make a bigger bubble, and soon it's going to burst.

He has to block everything out to focus: the sound of the guards' footfalls, the occasional screams from the torture chamber below them, the over-warm weight of George in his lap. He shuts so much off, he doesn't notice the first time George smacks him in the chest.

He notices the second time, though, and drops his Silencing, and he'd like to say it's because he knows this means she's ready, but actually, she's just broken his focus.

"Alistair, *look*."

He opens his eyes just in time to see an arrowhead burst out the back of the guard's skull and the man's body slump to the ground.

Leliana is standing there, longbow drawn, with Pudding pouncing on the other guard and mauling him. George shoots to her feet and goes to the bars, and Alistair follows, if only so he can kind of hide behind her.

Leliana gracefully stoops to cut the guard's belt, drawing a ring of keys off.

"So," she says, "would the two of you like to get out of this place?"

Author's Note:

If you want to see pictures of George and also my inevitable falling in love with Nathaniel Howe, visit my tumblr [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to experience me being a nerd about classics, visit me on Twitter [@luddlestons](#) and if you want to see all that but horny (including Alistair getting pegged) I invite you to my NSFW twitter [@luddlessmut](#)